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Students Get Look at CIA Role Models

By MIKE WARD, *Times Staff Writer*

CLAREMONT—The Central Intelligence Agency, apparently smarting from disclosures that former CIA men have sold equipment to terrorists and secrets to the Soviets, is sending employees to college campuses to explain the agency's work.

Two CIA men, one a recruiter and the other the chief of the international terrorism branch in the agency's research and analysis section, spoke to classes at the Claremont Colleges this week as part of a tour that included stops at Caltech, USC and UC Santa Barbara.

Larry Curran, the recruiter, said bringing CIA analysts from Washington to talk with students is part of a pilot program to aid the recruitment effort.

Curran, 56, who has been recruiting employees for the CIA for 16 years, said there has never been a shortage of applicants, but he thinks it is helpful to have students talk with top CIA analysts to get an understanding of what working for the agency entails.

"They get a look at a role model," said Curran. "It pulls away the mystique."

Not all the mystique, naturally. Curran's CIA business card, for example, does not list an address, merely a post office box in Lawndale. And a call to his phone number is not greeted by, "Hello, CIA" or any other mention of the agency, just the simple phrase: "Personnel Office."

Richard Coffman, who became chief of the terrorism branch three months ago, was careful in his talk. Questions about Libyan involvement in terrorism, or the Irish Republican Army's activities, for example, elicited nothing that could be characterized as news.

Tough Questions From Class

Coffman and Curran spoke to classes at Claremont McKenna College and the Claremont Graduate School. The graduate school class, taught by Tom Gray, deals with organized crime, and class members asked tough questions about the agency and its workings.

One student wanted to know if the CIA was being politicized under President Reagan and CIA Director William Casey.

Coffman said that bringing in a new CIA director has become routine in recent administrations, just like appointing a new cabinet. But, he said, that doesn't mean the CIA is losing its independence.

"If I were the President, I would not want a director of the Central Intelligence Agency who only told me what I wanted to hear," he said.

Coffman said the agency does not advocate or formulate policy, but provides relevant information to policy makers. "We don't push policy recommendations," he insisted.

Policy may be said, but many considerations, com-

Curran interjects, they may "have to live with us" because they may not agree with the policy decisions that are made.

Coffman, 40, joined the agency in 1967. He worked on research and analysis of North Vietnamese political and military affairs during the Vietnam War and spent time in Paris helping the American delegation at the Vietnam peace talks.

Coffman said he was surprised at the time by how little this country knew about North Vietnam.

Understanding Hard to Get

"We knew who the leaders were," he said, "but we did not know what their predispositions were, their relative power in decision-making circles. I found this surprising given the fact that we were engaged in what was then a bloody and expensive war."

Later, Coffman worked on Chinese matters and also carried out assignments in Europe. He has held his present position in research and analysis of international terrorism since August.

Coffman said he has been impressed with how difficult it is to get a full understanding of all the terrorist movements, their links, their dissimilarities and other factors.

He said terrorists are more comparable to a criminal organization than to a military unit.

"Put yourself in the position of a person in a terrorist group," he said. "Your targets are fairly low risk. You don't need a lot of equipment. You don't need a lot of infrastructure. You're not a conventional, normal military organization."

"Explosives and weapons are available almost anywhere in the world. You can go to many major cities in Europe and buy just about anything you please by way of weaponry if you know the right people. . . . The tools of the trade are easy to obtain."

Asked about Soviet involvement in terrorism, Coffman said, "Soviets to some extent benefit from terrorism, but they've also been the victims of terrorism." He noted that Soviet advisers in Syria have been assassinated and Soviet aircraft have been hijacked.

It is an open question, he said, whether terrorist attacks on American military personnel in Germany have aided or hurt the Soviet campaign against modernization of nuclear forces in Western Europe.

Pressed for information on whether the Soviets have worked through Libya to finance terrorism, Coffman was discreet. "Information about terrorist groups, links, patron state support is very sensitive information . . . hard to come by," he remarked. "And that's about all I can say. Good question."